Nicholas PARKS and Robinson LYON in Early Bytown

(Robinson Lyon later went to Arnprior, Ontario)

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In order to repeat an historical account of the past, I must commence with the background of Nicholas Sparks, Esquire. The following is transcribed from the book [The Irishman In Canada], by Nicholas Flood Davin dated September 22nd, 1877.

“Nicholas Sparks was a native of Wexford, who emigrated to Canada in 1816. Having worked his way up to the Township of Hull, on the north shore of the Ottawa River and directly opposite the site of the present City of Ottawa, he engaged as a farm servant with Philemon Wright. He saved a sufficient sum to purchase Lot C in Concession C, Rideau front, in the Township of Nepean, consisting of 200 acres, on the south side of the Ottawa River. He bought the lot from John B. Honey, the patentee from the Crown, on the 20th of June, A.D. 1826, for 95 pounds sterling. At the time of his purchase the lot was wild bush, which it was his intention to turn to farming purposes. Having his own hands cleared a spot he built a shanty. The commencement of the Rideau Canal in the following year, however, changed his purpose. With his natural shrewdness, he perceived that his and the surrounding property was destined to be the site of a town of some importance, and the lot purchased by him for ninety five pounds is now one of the most populous and wealthy portions of the City of Ottawa, where stand the Court House, the Jail, the City Hall, the Post Office, the Ladies College, the Opera House, the Orange Hall, the protestant Orphan’s Home, Christ Church, St. Andrew’s Church, the Dominion Wesleyan Methodist Church, the Baptist Church, the Congregational Church, the Catholic Apostolic Church, Russell House, several first class hotels, and every Bank in the City. The property with the buildings is now estimated as worth four million dollars.
Mr. Sparks was a Conservative in politics, but never pushed himself forward in political life, the only public positions he held being that of alderman for the city, during the years 1855-6-7, and the Justice of the Peace for the County of Carleton. Unostentatious in his prosperity, he was made of the choicest human clay. The Court-House and Jail Square, and City Hall Square were presented by him to Bytown; and to the Church of England, of which he was a member, the site for Christ Church, with parsonage and school. He died on the 27th February, 1862, aged sixty-eight years, leaving one son, who has since died, and two daughters, who survive.”

Nicholas Sparks sub-divided his lots and either sold them or leased them, one in particular was a lot leased to Robinson Lyon in 1847 for an yearly sum of 72 pounds, paid in quarterly payments of 18 pounds. (Information from family researcher Antoinette Nielson). This was lot 11, the south-west corner of Market Square also known as Lyon and Sparks Street known today.
Robinson Lyon arrived in Canada from Scotland in 1836 and resided in The Village of Richmond as an Innkeeper.
In the 1842 census, there were 2 members of Scotland, 2 Canada born and 1 from England. Two males under 5 years, 1 female over 5 but not 14, 1 married female and 1 single female over 14 but not 45. There were 5 members of the Church of Scotland and 1 of the Church of Rome. NOTE: Also in Richmond was Captain George Lyon who also had a son named Robinson E. Lyon and is not known if there was a family relation. Robinson Lyon the Innkeeper had 182 acres with 30 acres improved. He produced 135 bushels of wheat, 475
bushels of Oats and 100 bushels of Potatoes. He owned 5 neat cattle, 2 horses and 2 hogs. Two children attending school for school tax money. From the Bytown Gazette, Wednesday March 7, 1838, “At Richmond, on Thursday last, the 1st instant, Mrs. Robinson Lyon, of a son.” The family moved to Sparks and Lyon Street in 1847 to begin a life as Innkeepers of the Exchange Hotel.

From the Ottawa Packet, Saturday, February 19th, 1848 shows obit: “Lyon: In this Town on the 17th instant, after a long illness, Mary Ann, wife of Mr. Robinson Lyon (spelled Robertson) aged 39 years, leaving an affectionate husband and a young family to mourn her loss.” Very shortly after Robinson Lyon re-married. 15 Mar 1848, at the Manse, in Packenham, Robinson LYON of Bytown, to Flore, 6th daughter of John MCMULLEN of Cumberland.

The 1851 census has Robinson Lyon as Innkeeper with his new wife Flora.
In 1854 Robinson Lyon’s eldest daughter married. From the Ottawa Citizen, Saturday, June 17th, 1854 has the following:

**MARRIED.**

At the Chaudiere House, Bytown, on the 12th instant, by the Reverend Alexander Spence, Rev. H. E. I. Shepleys, Esq., of Sacramento City, California, to Eliseet, eldest daughter of Robinson Lyon, Esq.,

**EXCHANGE HOTEL,**

**UPPER OTTAWA.**

Robinson Lyon begs leave to return thanks to his old customers for the liberal patronage extended to him since he commenced business in this City.

He would inform them that he has leased the Exchange Hotel, Upper Town, for a term of years, and made arrangements therein which he is convinced will give satisfaction to Travellers and others who may favor him with a visit.

Parties travelling by Railway stopping at his House will be conveyed to and from the Cars free of charge.

Ottawa, March 13th, 1856.

Sometimes between 1856 and 1860 this Hotel burned down, and the lot appeared to remain empty until the construction of the Butler Hotel after 1901 but before 1912, which suffered a fire in 1938 with the loss of 2 lives. There were two other hotels in Bytown named Woods Exchange Hotel and Royal Exchange. They may have been one in the same, named differently after the sale and re-purchase in 1860. The Royal Exchange was on Wellington, just East of St. Andrews Church.

Robinson Lyon moved his family to Arnprior after the fire to again begin life as an Innkeeper. From the Ottawa Citizen, Old Time Stuff, September 1, 1928 I have the following story of The Exchange Hotel and Robinson Lyon;
Something Real Old in the Hotel Line

UPPER BYTOWN.

ROBINSON LYON

such accommodations as are not to be surpassed at any other establishment in Canada. His Table will at all times be supplied with the best and choicest viands of the season. His Wines will be of the finest and choicest Vintage; and he pledges himself that nothing shall be wanting on his part, to render his customers both comfortable and at home whilst remaining with him.

He also begs to inform the public, that he has a LIVERY ESTABLISHMENT attached to the Exchange Hotel, and at all times be prepared to supply his customers with Saddle, Harness, and every sort of reasonable Vehicle. There will also be an Omnibus always in waiting on the arrival of the Steamer from Montreal and Kingston, by which Passengers will be conveyed from the landings to his house, and also from the Hotel to the Buses on departure, FREE of CHARGE.

N. B.—Stages will run daily from the Exchange Hotel, Aylmer, to meet the Steam Boats on the Château de la Reine.

Upper Bytown, 1st May, 1849.

The old Exchange Hotel which stood on the site of the present Butler House and which faced on Sparks Street. This hotel, which was erected in the early forties, was owned by Robinson Lyon, one of the earliest of the Bytown hotel keepers. (See matter herewith.)
It was noted by me looking through the papers, other Hotels started providing the service to
and from to Rail and Steamboats.

And from the Ottawa Citizen dated March 29, 1929 a follow-up on Robinson Lyon.
He is buried in Albert Cemetery in Arnprior.
For those who are interested, the corner of Sparks and Lyon streets have some history, which has been presented to you. Today it looks much different. What I did find interesting was the Nicholas Sparks house on Sparks Street, west of the Butler, later known as the Belmont Hotel. The following picture shows the east wall revealing the original stone structure from the 1840’s. Please enjoy,

Taylor Kennedy